

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DENTAL QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMISSION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

CONTINUING DENTAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR DENTISTS WAC 246-817-440 – ADOPTED JUNE 29, 2001

- **Where can I reference the specific rules pertaining to continuing education requirements for dentists?**

Please refer to WAC 246-817-440, Continuing education requirements (for dentists), recently adopted by the Dental Quality Assurance Commission (Commission). Please refer to WAC 246-12, Administrative Procedures and Requirements for Credentialed Health Care Providers. Part 7 of this chapter specifically addresses continuing education, when it is required, how to prove compliance, auditing, acceptable auditing documentation, exemptions, how credit hours are determined, carrying over continuing education credits, taking the same course more than once during a reporting cycle. The requirements of WAC 246-12 apply to all health care practitioners and will be used in conjunction with WAC 248-817-440, for dentists.

- **How did this requirement come about?**

The Washington State Dental Association (WSDA) sponsored the 1999 legislation that required the Commission to implement a continuing education requirement for all dentists with active Washington licenses.

- **When can I start accumulating hours?**

You may start accumulating continuing education hours beginning July 1, 2001.

- **What is considered a credit “hour” for continuing education?**

*WAC 246-12-220 states in part: “a credit hour is defined as time actually spent in a course or other activities as determined by the regulatory entity. A **credit hour** for time actually spent in a course **can not be less than 50 minutes**, (excluding breaks).*

- **How often must I report CE hours to the state?**

***21 hours** must be reported with renewal cycles beginning July 1, 2002 and thereafter.*

- **Do I need to send in paper documentation of my continuing education coursework along with my renewal? Will you approve continuing education courses for credit?**

NO!! You will be required to sign an affidavit of compliance (on the back of your annual renewal notice.)

We will then randomly audit up to 25% of all renewals as allowed by WAC 246-12-190. Following your annual renewal, you may receive a notification of an audit. Only then, will you be required to provide actual written documentation of the dates and hours of the continuing education that you have obtained and reported with your renewal. We will not keep your documentation on file, nor will we approve coursework. Please keep your continuing education documentation in an accessible manner for at least four years after accumulation. In the event you are audited, you will want to be able to easily access your information. There is more information about acceptable audit documentation included in Chapter 246-12, Part 7, which is attached for your convenience.

- **Why did the DQAC implement rules that require reporting every year?**

The Department of Health got the legislative mandate to implement a continuing education reporting requirement, but received no additional funding or staffing. Administratively, it is a more efficient use of existing staffing and financial resources to have the renewal reporting cycle run concurrent with the annual birth date renewal cycle.

- **Why were certain hour limitations imposed on the suggested categories of continuing education sources?**

Every effort was made to make the continuing education rules flexible and discretionary for the dentist. Because the Commission believes the intent of CE is to improve and enhance the professional development of the dentist, and/or to improve the care provided to patients, it is strongly suggested that dentists accumulate hours from a broad range of categories.

- **Can I count continuing education hours I accumulate for other sources, (i.e. national certification with specialty organizations, etc.) towards this requirement?**

Yes, we have no concerns about using continuing education hours for more than one purpose as long as the courses enhance the professional development of the dentist and/or improves care provided to patients.

There is one exception. *If your license is disciplined by the Commission and continuing education coursework is required as a disciplinary sanction, the annual renewal requirement must be accumulated **in addition** to the sanction requirements.*

- ***We want to put on a continuing education course. What do we have to do to have it approved?***

The Commission will not be approving continuing education coursework. The law (WAC 246-12, Part 7) indicates that a credit hour for time actually spent in a course can not be less than 50 minutes. All courses must be designed to enhance the professional development of the dentist or improve the care provided to patients. Other organizations, such as the American Dental Association accredit continuing education courses. Also, for documentation purposes, you may want to provide a document to dentists attending your program, stating the name of the course, the date(s) taken, and the total number of continuing education hours completed.

- ***Does my study club have to be “recognized” by some entity to be considered acceptable?***

*No. The continuing education rule states in part that “ course work must contribute to the professional knowledge and development of the practitioner, or enhance services provided to patients. Courses that are **offered or authorized** by industry recognized state, private, national and international organizations, agencies or institutions of higher learning will be considered acceptable continuing education sources.” Study club hours are an acceptable source of continuing education, provided the coursework is designed to enhance the professional knowledge and development of the practitioner or enhance services provided to patients. We do realize there are various types of study clubs and that some are more “social” in nature, while others are offered, authorized or accredited by various professional organizations.*

- ***One of the dental product vendors wants to come into my office and provide an “in service” training to me and my staff on new dental products and materials, techniques and equipment. Is this acceptable continuing education?***

Yes, this would be acceptable continuing education. Remember, 50 minutes is a credit hour, and you should get some type of documentation of the content of the training, the time spent, etc. for your records, in case of an audit. We would consider this, per the rule, as training offered or authorized by an industry recognized “private” organization or agency. This type of training is designed to contribute to the professional knowledge and development of the practitioner, and to enhance services provided to patients, and would therefore be acceptable.

- ***Can I carry over continuing education hours from one year to the next?***

Please refer to WAC 246-12-230. According to this law, continuing education in excess of the required hours earned in a reporting period cannot be carried forward to the next reporting cycle.

- **Explain the “volunteer services” category – what types of volunteer services are acceptable?**

The Commission recognizes the value of dentists providing volunteer services to targeted populations. There are benefits to both the dentist and the recipient. The Commission determined that if the dentist obtains some specialized training or education, prior to providing services to a specific population, that up to 7 continuing education hours could be accumulated per reporting cycle. Examples of this type of continuing education would be working with the Special Olympics, working with the Smilemobile or ABCD programs, etc. Most of these programs provide training/orientation program to dentists working in these settings.

It is not the intention for continuing education hours to be granted for routine pro-bono work that is not preceded by specialized education or instructional training.

- **Where can I review/obtain a copy of the Dental Practice Act, with the updates of recent legislation, and other pertinent information?**

This information can be accessed via the Internet (See Website address within this mailing) and also can be mailed to you in a hard copy format.

When legislation is passed or rules are amended or newly adopted, it usually takes the Code Reviser for the State of Washington approximately three months to get the changes codified into the law. We typically print law books every 6 months or so, and try to provide the most updated versions available. You may also sign up for “ListServ” notification via e-mail by going to our website. This will notify you via e-mail of the Commission’s agendas, minutes, and other pertinent information.